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ABSTRACT

This guide for counselors describes the Critical Events Interview (CEI), a new counseling technique designed to be used with women in transition. The concept of critical events and their influence on adult development is described and the history and current status of the CEI are reviewed, along with current results of CEI evaluations and descriptions of its use in counselor training. Detailed information is provided to enable counseling practitioners to use the technique. Applications of the CEI, descriptions of the informational categories, and guidelines for administering the CEI in counseling are discussed. The contents and processes of the CEI are related to a range of counseling perspectives, and reviewed from a behavioral, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological/existential framework. Developmental approaches are also discussed, as in the influence of feminist therapy. The appendix includes sample CEI formats which may be duplicated for use in practice and training, and examples of completed CEI's. (JAC)

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THE CRITICAL EVENTS INTERVIEW MANUAL

by

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and

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Additional materials developed by the Center for Woman's Identity Studies may be ordered c/o Dr. Donna M. Avery, Director, 1654 Evergreen Road, Homewood, Illinois 60430. Orders must be prepaid.

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Ideal for "helping professionals" -- those social workers, psychiatrists and counselors responsible for the delivery of mental health services to women. This resource handbook provides information about those critical events in women's lives that influence their identity in a time of rapid social change.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Critical Events Interview (CEI) is a new counseling technique designed to be used with women in transition. It reflects a variety of theoretical approaches to counseling and adult development, and grows out of both research into the lives of contemporary women and the practice of counseling women individually and in groups. Through both its content and its process, the CEI systematically addresses those issues most often manifest by women seeking counseling. Finally, it provides a basis for action and decision making which is shared by both counselor and client.

This manual has four purposes:

1. to enable the counselor to understand, operationalize and integrate the CEI into ongoing counseling practice and training;
2. to document the usefulness of the CEI as a technique for counseling contemporary women in life transitions;
3. to provide an overview of the development, evaluation and current applications of the CEI; and
4. to relate the CEI to the major theoretical approaches in counseling and human development.

Appendix material includes sample CEI formats (which may be duplicated for use in practice and training) and examples of completed CEI's.

As the title indicates, the CEI focuses upon the exploration, and for some clients the re-experiencing, of perceived critical events in the life of the client. The CEI assists both client and counselor in identifying those events and in recalling important aspects of their accompanying dynamics

including thoughts, feelings, coping strategies, factors facilitating and hindering resolution, and both past and present meanings of the event for the client.

Most counseling practice generally involves some client recollection of previous experiences as they relate to the presenting problem or issue. The CEI goes a step further by providing a systematic format for recalling such experiences and a structure which allows both client and counselor to compare categories of information over several life events. As one counselor in a community mental health center said, "The CEI provided a vehicle to discover processes and patterns which clients were carrying around that were hooked into previous critical events."

The CEI gives the client a framework through which to learn about herself from her own life experiences while at the same time, teaching her counselor about her unique history as a woman. Some practitioners have described the CEI as a process through which the client constructs her own developmental history, thereby bringing self-selected aspects of her past and present identity into conscious awareness. In this way, the CEI provides client and counselor with a basis of shared information which may subsequently be used to plan further treatment, to identify additional resources, to make life decisions and to take future action.

Although the CEI was originally intended for use early in counseling, it has proven useful at other points in the process as well. A counselor who participated in CEI pilot testing used the procedure with a woman who had been in counseling for over a year. "My client found it (CEI) helpful, insightful, painful, scary - better having gotten it out - hadn't told it (incest) before. The client told me that it helped her to identify the

beginning of her depression."

DESCRIPTION OF CRITICAL EVENTS

Women seeking counseling are frequently in the midst of a critical life event. In his writings on the identity formation process, Erik Erikson (1968) called attention to the idea of critical events as turning points or critical moments when previously held notions about the self are called into question.

Although the identity formation process is continuous, in the life of every person there are particular critical events or series of events so powerful in nature, so pervasive in scope, as to challenge existing assumptions about self, roles and relationships. Something happens, something powerful enough to cause the person to ask "who am I now?" There is the sense that "who I was before" is no longer adequate to meet the demands of the new life situation. Critical events provide the occasion for the redefinition of one's identity and for the acquisition of new skills and capacities necessary to successfully address the issues, handle the responsibilities and implement the decisions which accompany the positive resolution of the critical event.

Consideration of the dictionary meanings of the term "critical" further clarifies the characteristics of critical events:

1. critical events involve or anticipate change, often abrupt and pervasive change. Examples include the death of a loved one, divorce and desertion.

2. uncertainty and risk accompany critical events as exemplified in leaving home, receiving a diagnosis of a life threatening illness, assuming a new job or unemployment.

3. although an essential part of the life process, the occurence of critical events may be rare. In studies of perceived critical events in the lives of adult women, (Avery, 1980, 1981), participants reported a range of from three to nine events.

4. there is a decisive and cumulative quality to critical events. They precipitate a chain reaction effecting and shaping many areas of the person's life. Pregnancy, marriage, re-entry into education or employment, and immigration are examples.

Because critical events involve change, uncertainty and risk, because they are relatively rare as well as decisive and cumulative, it is precisely at such times that the individual is open to new insights, awarenesses and self-understandings, to new experiences and actions, and to previously unimagined dimensions of self on the one hand, but equally vulnerable to fear, anxiety, depression, immobilization and rage on the other.

The successful resolution of critical events inaugurates a new sense of personal efficacy, a reaffirmation of self and movement toward higher levels of personal integration and differentiation. Critical events demand the power and ability to make decisions about the future course of one's existence and the meaning of that existence at a given point in human history and within a given socio-cultural context.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF CRITICAL EVENTS FOR WOMEN

More often than not, critical events in the lives of contemporary women call for planning and self-directed action and require the development of greater degrees of independence and assertiveness, qualities which most women have been socialized to reject, if not fear. For some women, changes in their life situations or socio-economic circumstances bring responsibilities

for which they are unprepared. Displaced homemakers, single heads of households and the growing number of of surviving widows are all examples of women thrust by forces seemingly beyond their control into alien situations which little in their socialization process and previous life experience has prepared them to understand, much less serve as a basis for decision and action. For other women, self expectations have expanded to embrace new roles and role combinations, but frequently without the opportunity to develop the attitudes and abilities necessary to implement those roles and manage the conflict between them. But, whatever the particular circumstances, the traditional, familiar ways of thinking about self and the world have been disrupted and they no longer provide an adequate basis for decision and action.

Recent research, using the CEI to identify the nature and dynamics of critical events in the lives of contemporary adult women, provides insight into factors associated with the resolution of such events. Through a content analysis of 624 individual critical events reported by 100 women participants, three characteristics associated with the positive, growthful resolution of critical events have been identified (Shirley & Harmon, 1982). They are: 1) the expression of personal courage; 2) the enhancement of self worth; and 3) the movement from dependence through independence to interdependence. A report describing the complete findings from this analysis, together with their application to the practice of counseling women, is currently being prepared by the Center for Woman's Identity Studies.

On the other hand, raters who participated in the content analysis process reported being repeatedly struck by the following themes manifest in

the critical events material:

1. an external orientation or viewing the self through roles, expectations of others and relationships, with little sense of choice and purpose.

2. the adoption of coping strategies which at best provided only short term relief rather than reflecting long term life planning.

3. an avoidance of personal power and responsibility accompanied by feelings of frustration, hopelessness and devaluation of their lives.

4. a sense that the clear articulation of self and the pursuit of one's own needs are signs of selfishness.

Experienced counselors of women today will recognize the three characteristics of courage, self-worth and interdependence associated with the positive, growthful resolution of critical events. Further, for those members of the helping professions who provide services and programs to facilitate women's development, the themes reflecting external orientations, short term coping strategies, avoidance of power, and guilt over the pursuit of personal needs are all too familiar and are played out over and over again with cultural and socio-economic variations.

Clearly, both the characteristics and the themes manifest in the critical life events of contemporary women reflect the effects of traditional sex role socialization as well as the need and capacity to move toward more complete personhood. Because of changes in the context of women's lives and because of women's increasing consciousness of their personhood, roles, rights and responsibilities, the critical events in their lives are likely to be accompanied by a kind of epiphany which illuminates the reality, scope and meaning of their second class citizenship. There comes a growing and gnawing

awareness that all is not right, that women are consistently perceived as persons with derived status to be used and discarded at the decision of another.

While the overall goal of counseling women in transition must be to empower the client, both philosophically and practically, to understand, confront and ultimately act upon the myriad dimensions of her life, the CEI is a technique which works directly toward that goal. As one woman described the impact of the CEI, "I now put me first, what I want, how does this affect me and my plans. Before, I came after the family, church, obligations, what was 'right.'"

With a minimum of structure, the CEI provides a format through which the woman introduces self-selected life experiences and their dynamics, thus allowing for differences in both culture and socialization vis-a-vis counselor and client. Exploring critical events material exposes the limitations of sex role socialization patterns which may have restricted previous choices.

Equally powerful to the experience of the CEI is the recognition of strengths possessed (if unacknowledged) as they are revealed through the client's narration of critical events. By bringing her face to face with past restrictions, either internally or externally imposed, the CEI gives the client a basis for new decisions and actions. A client who participated in the pilot testing of the CEI summed it up beautifully: "It changed my opinion of myself for the better - changed how I relate to those around me and gave me the courage to make the changes that had to be made."

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter the development and current status of the CEI are presented. The CEI as it was originally developed for research will be reviewed together with follow up information from the original research participants. Current results from evaluation and training are reviewed together with further applications of the CEI.

HISTORY

The CEI was originally developed as part of a research project conducted in 1978 at Chicago State University and funded by a grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act Program, U. S. Education Department. Called Project Stages, this research involved interviewing 100 white and black women about perceived critical events or turning points in their lives. The data from the original 100 interviews, together with related counseling implications, have been published as Critical Events Shaping Woman's Identity: A Handbook for the Helping Professions (Avery, 1980).

Each woman interviewed was asked to select those events or turning points she felt had had an impact on her present identity. Further, she was asked to describe her behaviors, feelings, thoughts, coping strategies and ideology, as well as to specify both roadblocks to resolution and key to movement for each critical event.

From this research experience came the recognition that for many women the interview itself became the occasion for reflection about their lives, for the dawning of realizations about themselves, for the identification of their own previously unrecognized power and strength. Some women even went so far as to indicate that, were they to be asked in the future to describe the critical events in their lives, they would identify the interview as one of those events.

Approximately two years after the original study, telephone follow up interviews were conducted with nine women randomly selected from the 100 original participants to identify long term outcomes of the CEI. In general, these women described the CEI as valuable because, in their words, it helped to "put my life into perspective - put it all together," "see the patterns in my life." "It gave me a chance to reflect on my actions."

Material from the telephone follow up interviews was reviewed for common patterns and a written questionnaire reflecting those common patterns was developed subsequently. Written questionnaires were then sent to the remaining participants. Thirty-four women returned completed follow up questionnaires.

Although some women could not remember the interview, participated primarily to provide research data, or saw the interview as having little or no impact on their lives, most of the long term responses were positive in that the women viewed the experience as having had an impact on their lives. In general, the following CEI outcomes were reported:

1. increased courage, power, confidence and control;
2. clarified relationships between past and present events and choices;

3. identified unresolved conflicts and inadequate coping strategies;

4. promoted wholeness and a sense of self as separate person - separate from the roles and expectations of others.

Although the CEI had some real value or meaning for most of the women who responded to the follow up questionnaire, the impact appeared to have been greater for women who had <u>not</u> been in counseling, Women's Studies programs, or who had <u>not</u> had non-judgmental supportive relationships with family and friends.

The following statements have been taken from the follow up questionnaires:

> "Before, I felt I was doing daily what had to be done. I felt trapped and it showed in my attitude. I now make choices. I feel now I am an attractive, very successful woman - with lots more I'm going to do - and do well."

> "I am becoming more aware that I tend not to make decisions. The interview made me realize that this tendency has always been there."

> "Perhaps it (CEI) was influential in helping me realize that coping is related strongly to how I feel about myself at the time."

In preparing to modify the CEI for use in counseling, a series of practice interviews were conducted. The practice interviews provided direction for CEI revisions, including the rewording of existing questions, the development of new and alternative questions, the addition of other informational categories and the clarification of client directions. A practitioner's CEI manual was written for use in field testing and evaluation.

EVALUATION

Two evaluation sites were used, a community mental health center and a non-profit adult counseling center. Six counselors and fifteen women clients participated in the evaluation of the CEI. Prior to testing the CEI with these clients, the counselors participated in a training session which included a demonstration and role playing. Counselors also received copies of the practitioner's manual in advance of the training session.

The evaluation process was designed to achieve two purposes. The first was to compare the experiences of the counselor and client during the CEI. A brief questionnaire, the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) (Stiles, 1980) was used for this purpose. The SEQ consists of twenty-two bipolar adjective scales presented in a seven point semantic differential format. Both client and counselor completed the SEQ independently immediately after the session. This instrument provided client and counselor ratings of the session and of their feelings immediately following the CEI.

The second purpose of the evaluation process was to obtain feedback from counselors about the usefulness and effectiveness of the CEI. After completing the CEI sessions, counselors were contacted by the Center for Woman's Identity Studies for a telephone conference. During this conference, the counselor's impressions of the technique and its implications in terms of counselor-client relationships and treatment approaches were explored.

Twenty-seven SEQs were returned, fifteen from counselors and twelve from clients. Three sessions were represented only by counselor evaluations. Preliminary review of counselor SEQs indicated high ratings on variables such as powerful, confident, valuable and definite. On these vari-

ables, nine ratings were high, two were moderate and four were moderate to low. On overall ratings of the CEI sessions, ten counselors rated the session as good and five rated it neutral. Client evaluations of these sessions tended to be lower than the counselors' evaluations. Clients chose some negative adjectives to describe their experience (difficult, tense, rough, detached, uncertain). Ratings were higher on variables like safe, relaxed, valuable. Nine clients rated the overall session good, and the other three clients rated it as more neutral.

Counselor and client ratings of the CEI sessions were reviewed jointly. One was clearly congruent, eight were moderately congruent, and three were not congruent. Overall, counselors rated the sessions and their experience immediately following the session more positively than did the clients. In particular, clients appeared to experience more discomfort after the session. Findings indicate that the sessions were generally evaluated positively, even though the clients may have experienced some difficulty.

Although it was suggested that the interview be done during the second session, only two were actually done at that point in the counseling process. The remaining CEI's were done either in the first session (two clients) or during later counseling sessions.

In terms of what transpired prior to the CEI sessions, responses varied regarding the length of time the client had been seen. In two cases, the counseling process was at an impasse and the CEI helped raise important issues that had not surfaced or had not been adequately explored in the "what happened this week" approach.

The CEI was seen by counselors as a technique which provided good struc-

ture for client and practitioner. One counselor stated, "I was thrilled. It gave new data - it was a valuable tool - I want to have it available." Other counselors indicated wanting to use it again and try it out with different kinds of women clients. Counselors seemed to like the results they obtained from using the CEI but said their style and approach was usually much "looser."

Some counselors reported on client behavior in subsequent sessions. One counselor stated that clients were more open in discussing the past. "It helped to focus on thinking versus feelings, to discuss the difference and help the client focus more on thinking." Another counselor described the CEI as "... a beginning foundation to work with women clients."

In terms of implications for the counseling relationship, the CEI was viewed by counselors as a way to break the ice, to build rapport, establish empathy and trust. The CEI gives the client a sense that "you can help them and that they can help themselves."

Additional examples of counselor evaluations were:

> "She really started resolving the whole thing (father's death). I got things from her that I hadn't before, data, feelings. She felt it was good to talk about it, began to deal with it. She had some insights about herself and felt really good about it."

> "Helped her focus. She had shifted around. Very special. She got excited about counseling, making decisions. Put together pieces she hadn't seen before."

> "Something very similar to what she is going through now. Same kind of transition. Looking at the transition twelve years ago helped her in terms of her transition now. She has a much better opinion of herself now."

Most counselors reported no trouble administering the CEI, stating that

the questions flowed naturally. There was some difficulty for one client in identifying the ideology. The feelings/thoughts categories raised issues about clients "mixing" these two. The roadblocks to resolution and, in particular, trade offs, were not well understood by two counselors who felt they were either inappropriate or redundant.

TRAINING

At this time, approximately fifty counseling practitioners representing a wide range of service settings, theoretical orientations and levels of professional education, have been trained to use the CEI.

Typical training workshops included a review of the history and development of the CEI, current evaluation results, directions for use, demonstrations, role playing by participants, processing the CEI and suggestions for application.

Trained practitioners reported ease in learning and understanding the CEI and described it as being useful in a wide range of counseling situations. Several counselors expressed their surprise at how well they got to know the person who assumed the client role in such a short period of time.

Questions about the use of the CEI with psychotic populations or with persons with little education were raised. The authors are clearly aware of the limitations of current knowledge on the use and effectiveness of the CEI with populations other than adult women in transition. Further investigation of these issues is encouraged and welcomed by the Center for Woman's Identity Studies.

Some modifications of the CEI are under consideration. One suggestion made by counselors has been to use the CEI as a technique to facilitate the discussion of personal issues in group counseling settings. Other counselors have indicated that the CEI might be self-administered. Focusing the CEI on particular types of critical events (for example, events relating to career and achievement or events pertaining to relationships) would increase the power and utility of the CEI in specific types of counseling, such as career counseling, family counseling and marital counseling.

FURTHER APPLICATIONS

The revised form of the CEI has been used in a companion study of Hispanic (Mexican-American and Puerto Rican) women, also conducted by the Center for Woman's Identity Studies. Findings have been presented in Critical Events Shaping the Hispanic Woman's Identity (Avery, 1981).

Currently, the CEI is being used in an investigation of developmental factors in the lives of socially radical women conducted at the University of Cincinnati. The Boston University Center for Rehabilitation, Research and Training in Mental Health has adapted part of the CEI to investigate particular kinds of critical incidents in the lives of support persons and family members of psychiatric clients. An important aspect of this research is to determine the needs and coping skills of support persons and family members in relation to specific behaviors of the identified psychiatric clients.

An adaptation of the CEI for young adults using a peer counseling model

has also been developed and described in Experiencing Your Identity: Developmental Activities for Academic and Community Settings (Arum, Blouin & Avery, In Press).

CHAPTER 3: USING THE CEI IN COUNSELING

USING THE CEI IN COUNSELING

The purpose of this chapter is to provide detailed information on the CEI so as to enable counseling practitioners to use the technique in their work. Applications of the CEI, descriptions of the informational categories and guidelines for administering the CEI in counseling are discussed in this chapter.

Before proceeding through this chapter, the reader will find it helpful to review both the CEI format and the suggested client directions contained in the Appendix. These materials may be removed for duplication.

APPLICATIONS OF THE CEI

The CEI is a technique which gives the counselor and the client a shared perspective on the client's life. Used early in counseling, it provides a systematic method of obtaining information about a wide range of events involving relationships, education, work, health and others. The CEI can also serve as an experiential process through which the client gains a sense of personal power through recreating past events and realizing that she is indeed the author of her own life story. The CEI was originally designed for use early in counseling but it can also be used to break a later impasse or to raise important issues that have not surfaced or have not been adequately explored.

Women seeking counseling in the midst of life transitions are frequently preparing to make major decisions. While the CEI is not a decision-making technique per se, it is an experience contributing to decision readiness by bringing into focus a context of conditions including personal empowerment, a sense of perspective about self in the past, present and future, and the identification of both internal and external limitations manifest in previous life decisions. These decision readiness conditions provide both client and counselor with a shared framework against which alternatives may be examined. In this regard, the CEI has proven helpful with displaced homemakers, women returning to school and/or employment and other women faced with the challenge of rediscovering potentialities and forging new lifestyles.

The CEI experience is an opportunity for the counselor to be open to the client's exploration of self-chosen critical events, to act as facilitator to that exploration rather than interpreter. The counselor's role is to aid in the identification of strengths and strategies and to keep the client's focus on the critical event being processed.

Facilitating the CEI is much like watching someone open a walnut; the big pieces fall out immediately; the smaller nuggets may need to be nudged around a bit to get at their true value to the client. As the client teaches the counselor about each chosen event, she has an opportunity to recall aspects of the events in a new light. Seen with the perspective of time, some glimmers of strengths possessed and coping strategies used come to the fore.

DESCRIPTION OF INFORMATIONAL CATEGORIES

A critical event has several dimensions (physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual) which together contribute to a woman's evolving experience of her identity. In structuring the CEI, several categories of information were chosen on the basis of their relevance to a wide range of theoretical orientations and counseling approaches. Although the categories are not all-inclusive, when taken together they provide the opportunity for the client to gain a sense of completion and resolution about her critical events.

The CEI is composed of nine informational categories as listed below:

1. the event
2. behavior
3. feelings and thoughts
4. coping strategies
5. ideology
6. key to movement
7. roadblocks to resolution
8. meaning
9. name

The description of each category follows, along with examples of the kinds of material presented by clients.

1. <u>The event</u>: The client selects an event or experience or happening that has made a difference in how she views herself. The event may be an external happening, for example a divorce or receiving a promotion, or in-

ternal phenomena such as decisions or realizations. However, sometimes the event may represent a series of events or an ongoing process, such as motherhood.

The questions on the CEI format are designed to elicit a clear, concise statement or series of statements about the event the client is beginning to explore. The client may need support in clarifying the event and focusing exclusively on it. The purpose of this category is to enable the client to specify the event which she will subsequently describe.

As the client describes each event, the nature of the event may appear to change. For example, a client might begin by stating that the event was her discovery of breast cancer, but it may become apparent that she is really talking about a spiritual crisis which the physical condition seemed to trigger. When she finally names the event, she might indeed call it a spiritual crisis.

Examples of <u>events</u>:

meeting my husband

becoming pregnant

my first job

returning to school

moving

my father's death

The following eight categories all pertain to the particular event identified.

2. Behavior: In the behavior category, the counselor explores background information. The actions or reactions of the client in relation to the event or experience are clarified. Brief details or circumstances surrounding the event are presented. Care must be taken to ensure that the client does not go into lengthy, descriptive material here.

Examples of behavior:

a. "Discovered lumps in breast. Began to reassess what and who I am, what I wanted for myself. Began to recognize and respect the needs of husband and self for independence as well as dependence."

b. "Dated a man for six years. Crazy about him, think he helped form my personality. Hoped to marry him, he was so special. I loved him - he married someone else."

c. "Started back at the university - realized that women need something for themselves. I saw my husband's world expanding as he was on the way up. My world at home was getting smaller and smaller."

3. Feelings and Thoughts: The client is asked to share feelings and thoughts about the event. It may be difficult for some clients to recall and express feelings while others may intellectualize rather than disclose painful feelings associated with the event. However, most clients, with support, will describe feelings and thoughts.

Discrepancies as well as the relationship between the two aspects of experience may be important to note. For example, some clients appear to think first and their feelings seem to derive from the cognitive process, while others may report an immediate physical or emotional response which they then cognitively label as a thought or feeling. These responses, when viewed over several events, will begin to unfold the cognitive/emo-

tional style of the client.

Examples of feelings and thoughts:

a. "Elated at the thought of a new start, but also felt alone, unsure, fearful, lacked confidence."

b. "I denied the disease - fought against the idea constantly. Angry that it happened to me just when I was discovering good capabilities in myself."

c. "Excited and scared about returning to school at my age. I allowed myself to get angry at expectations of family."

4. Coping Strategies: Coping strategies are techniques or methods for reduction of stress or tension caused by conflict. It is important to keep in mind that there is a wide range of coping responses both across individuals and for a given individual according to the situation and the level of conflict associated with the event. It is likewise important to remember that "doing nothing" is a coping strategy as much as an overt behavioral response is.

Since support and acceptance from others may be crucial at the time of a critical event, those persons or things which helped and/or hindered the client in responding to the event need to be recognized by the client. Overall, the counselor will want to get a sense of the degree to which the strategies adopted by the client were effective in handling the conflict.

Examples of coping strategies:

a. "Talking and crying - had a friend who I could talk to. Husband and I both went to a counselor."

b. "I kept my social life active."

c. "Became busy - active. Started working more and more. Refused to dwell on problems."

d. "Had a nervous breakdown, was hospitalized briefly then became involved in therapy."

5. Ideology: Ideology is perhaps the most difficult category to define. Ideology can be described as a system of beliefs or a point of view which influences the way in which the client experiences the world and herself. The view of self and the view of self in relation to the world are expressions of the boundaries of experience.

Some clients may find it difficult to focus on the ideology category because they are too close to the event or because the event is too distant, for example, in childhood. At these times, it will be helpful to assist the client focus on ideology by looking at herself from a third person perspective through the use of imagery (as suggested on the CEI format).

Examples of ideology:

a. "My life is going to be my own. I'm going to take care of myself and I'm not going to be vulnerable anymore."

b. "It (the world) was very happy and simple. It had definite boundaries. Some clear goals - to graduate and nothing else. How different. Right now, it is complicated, sophisticated in terms of human interaction. I don't see the boundaries that I saw at that time. And goals set at that time by external institutions or traditional goals are now set by myself."

c. "I was confused about being a woman at that time. I believed I always wanted to be a man. I think all things reinforced this. I wanted to be strong and ambitious, to be successful - men were all those things. Because my father told me I should be like this. I didn't like women, most of them were not very smart."

6. Key to Movement: The key to movement represents the overall or long term resolution of the event. During this portion of the EI, the client indicates whether the conflict associated with the event was ever resolved.

Usually events are resolved through some action, personal realization or subsequent event. For example, the uncertainty and emotional upheaval following a divorce might eventually be diminished through the establishment of another, more satisfying relationship.

The key to movement may also reflect the client's sense of personal growth and validation of self. Finally, there may be an acceptance that no more can be done to deal with the event, that she cannot, in fact, resolve it.

Examples of key to movement:

a. "I finally accepted the disease - tried to deal with it. The release from angry feelings freed up my energy to do other things."

b. "I had a neighbor who I talked to. She helped me see a little of the world beyond babies and in-laws. This was really important for me."

c. "When I was in college, I went through a period of questioning my life. I found that I liked myself. Being alone was alright. I found I didn't need to be surrounded by people. People who didn't like me or I didn't like. A fellow told me 'All of your friends really like you.' That's the way it's supposed to be - being close to the people worthwhile to me."

7. Roadblocks to Resolution: The questions used for this category are designed to determine from the client's perspective who or what diminished the likelihood of the critical event's being resolved. Even if the cli-

ent has made a decision which has resolved the event, there are usually some personal or social costs involved in doing so and these will be discussed under this category.

Examples of roadblocks to resolution:

a. "What held me back is that I always depended on others for the right answers."

b. "I experienced no progress. I was isolated and felt dissatisfied with being at home, and I knew that there were no teaching jobs available."

c. "Emotional demands sometimes exhausted my day-to-day energy levels."

8. Meaning: The client is asked to look at the event from her present perspective and to describe its present meaning. This discussion gives a sense of completion to both counselor and client about the event. The client can discover the meaning of the event in relation to her evolving sense of identity and to other critical events in her life, and then acknowledge herself for being the source of her own personal growth.

Examples of meaning:

a. "It was hell. It was a tremendous growing experience toward being an individual. It was a real big thing - I'm (not) with mother forever. Taught me that I could do things for myself; develop my own lifestyle - being different from my family. I learned to become my own person."

b. "It means that we are a changing system, organic not static. What keeps us ahead, it's our insight into the situation. Yes, I'm different now because I see it's fascinating. Everyone is going through the same process, conscious or unconscious. The most I learned is that we are a system and in order for the system to work well each part has to be healthy - the emotional, the

intellectual and the physical. If we pay attention to just one, the balance is disrupted."

c. "I have learned so much I am another woman. I resolved my life without the help of a man. The manner in which I live now, I have to involve myself alone."

9. Name: This category helps the client see the event she has just described in new ways. The names clients give generally reflect the learnings, realizations and psychological changes which accompanied the event. This category connects the specific event with the larger, ongoing developmental life processes. The learnings derived from the past event may be generalized to present and future critical events.

Examples of names:

"Putting myself first."

"Discovery of how strong I can be."

"How I postpone making decisions."

ADMINISTERING THE CEI

A. Preparation:

1. Study the CEI format so that you are familiar with the informational categories and their sequence. Be familiar with the questions and be prepared to formulate your own if the client has trouble responding to those suggested.
2. Have your goal for using the CEI clearly in mind. Do you primarily want information? Are you searching for patterns in behavior? Do you want to focus on specific kinds of events such as marriage

or career? Do you want her to experience the empowerment of telling her own story? How do you plan to follow up or use the information she will be giving you?

3. Prepare the client in the prior session. Begin by explaining the purpose and structure of the interview and why you are using it as a part of her treatment plan. An example of client instructions is located in the Appendix along with the CEI format. You may wish to modify the instructions, but they should include the following points:
   a. Define a "critical event." These can be experiences, happenings, turning points, or things that have made a difference in the unfolding of her life and development as a person. Also review briefly the categories of information contained in the CEI.
   b. Inform the client that there is no limit or required number of events, nor do they have to be discussed in the order in which she experienced them. You can both go back afterwards and determine their chronological order after the interview is completed.
   c. The events may or may not be known to anyone else or viewed as important to anyone else. Events may be external or internal. The important thing is that the client see these events as having made a difference to her. There are no right or wrong answers or preferred kinds of events.

B. The CEI Session:

1. Begin by reviewing the directions with the client and explaining your role as facilitator.
2. After your introduction, immediately ask the client for an event. She may need a little help in getting started. Be prepared to assist her if necessary. Use the format questions as appropriate. Be a good listener and be supportive.
3. It will be helpful to remind her to focus exclusively on this one event. Don't let her go on too long on any one question. Lead her into the other questions. For example, "Do you remember how you felt during that time?" "Who or what helped?" "Who or what hurt?" Don't hesitate to ask her to slow down in order to record her responses.
4. Don't interrupt or move too quickly. Stay on target and keep your pace without rushing the client. You may need to ask additional questions if the first response does not adequately answer the question. Be careful not to suggest an answer nor to confuse the client. Helpful suggestions include "I don't understand, would you please explain?" "Can you give me an example of that?" "Tell me more about it." You might also simply repeat the question on the CEI format.
5. In terms of recording the interview material. it has been suggested that the counselor record the information given by the client on the CEI format sheets. However, some practitioners have indicated that they prefer to use other methods which are more con-

sistent with their typical style during other sessions. They have suggested tape recording the CEI or using a one page abbreviated format to record the main points under each category. An abbreviated CEI format will be found in the Appendix.

6. Be professional in your acceptance of what the client narrates. Be objective, accepting and supportive. Don't exhibit shock or disappointment if she is not giving what you consider crucial or important material. Be patient, let her unfold her story in her style and in her own way. It is not unusual for a client to start with safe material and progress to a more personal or deeper level of material as she gains confidence in telling her own story.
7. One event can be described in 10-15 minutes. If you find that each event is taking more time, the client is probably going into too much detail.
8. When she has finished the first event, ask the client to talk about another critical event. You will need to use another set of CEI format sheets. One set is used for each event the client relates.
9. When the client has finished her narration of all events, go back over them and ask her to help you place the events in chronological order. You can then number the events in chronological order.
10. Check with the client to be sure that she has included everything that she desires to say about the events. Review any questions which may need further clarification, making certain that each of the informational categories are complete for each event.

11. Don't hesitate to share what you've written with the client.

12. Review the completed CEI format sheets as soon as possible after the client has left. This will enable you to recall more vividly the client's responses to specific questions. Do not reword or change responses. Rather, clarify or spell out your shorthand adding detail to your notes.

13. If time allows, the CEI session should be concluded with a sharing of the client's experience of the session. Counselors frequently begin the following session with an exploration of the client's experience of the CEI as a prelude to processing the content of the CEI.

C. Processing the CEI:

Most counselors process the CEI based on the nature of the material obtained and the presenting problems or issues being addressed at the point in counseling when the CEI is administered. The formulation of client problems and issues, as well as the processing of the interview material, reflects the theoretical framework and personal style of the counselor. Thus, the methods presented here are only suggestions upon which the counselor can build. Chapter 4, which presents the CEI in relation to major theoretical frameworks, will shed further light on applications of the CEI to the counseling process.

After reviewing the series of events separately and then in sequence, general patterns will begin to emerge. You might want to encourage the client to identify patterns in her experience and to

determine their meaning. Overall, it is important for the client to get a sense of how her view of herself, as reflected in these past events, affects her ability to cope with the present situation and to make effective decisions in the future.

1. Review with her the kinds of events she chose to talk about, i.e., relationships, education, work, health, intrapersonal issues, etc. Does the client see herself primarily in terms of one area of her life, or are the events reflective of many, diverse areas?
2. Review the patterns in her behavior as they were presented over time and in different events. In particular, notice behavioral excesses, deficits and her problem solving or other pertinent skill development.
3. Consider her coping strategies to identify patterns of handling conflict or stress. Be aware of how she views available support and resources. What are the range of responses which represented her alternatives? To what extent were her coping strategies effective in attaining her goals in the past?
4. Be aware of how she viewed herself and her world as reported in the ideology and meaning categories. Note her view of herself and the world as it has evolved over time and observe shifts which occurred in relation to the resolution of events. Does she presently operate from a sense of responsibility for past events or does she view herself as a victim of circumstances? Be aware of her view of her power and control in her life.

5. From responses to Roadblocks to Resolution and Key to Movement, the counselor can frequently determine movement toward the resolution of conflicts associated with past events. What feelings, beliefs and behavior patterns does the client cling to and is there any "payoff" for not resolving the events? In addition, what is the cost of not resolving the events in light of what she stands to gain from resolving them? You may also want to examine the resources, both internal and external, which have helped her to move toward resolution in the past. Are these resources available to her now in relation to her present problem?
6. To what extent is she ready to act in her own behalf? Does she tend to blame others? Is she waiting for someone or something to rescue her? Is she unwilling to decide or act because she is afraid to take the risk? Is she realistic about the consequences of her own actions?
7. Review her personal strengths and weaknesses as revealed in the CEI. Notice the degree to which she recognizes the power and courage demonstrated through the events. How has her view of herself expanded during her life? Does she view her life as growing or as contracting?
8. Does she have some awareness of herself as a person separate from her roles and the expectations of others? Are her relationships dependent, independent or interdependent? Have they changed over time? How?
9. Review her patterns of communication with others. What does she

tell people? With whom does she talk? Is she able to resolve problems using an open, direct and truthful approach?

10. Notice whether she had difficulty focusing on any particular informational category. Is it relatively easy for her to become aware of the various aspects of events and to integrate her experience of them in such a way as to discover their meaning?

SUMMARY

The CEI has been developed to engage the client in lining out events she perceives as pivotal in the ongoing process of her own identity formation. In selecting events and sharing their contents with the counselor, she is providing clues as to what that identity has been and, in an extraordinary sense, is teaching her counselor about her unique history as a woman. She alone knows how she acted, how she felt, how she managed to cope with roadblocks which interfered with satisfactory resolution of the event and what strategies helped move her along the way.

In order to enhance her capacity towards self-determination, the exploration of past critical events helps her forge a sense of how those events have impacted on her identity formation. Teaching the counselor about her own critical events enables the client to gain new insights into past happenings and to use those new insights to develop new strategies for growth. Whatever the subsequent treatment modality, the CEI provides a shared beginning for both client and counselor.

CHAPTER 4: THE CEI THROUGH THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

THE CEI THROUGH THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Since practicing counselors represent a range of theoretical orientations, this chapter relates the contents and processes of the CEI to several such perspectives. The CEI is reviewed from three major theoretical frameworks in psychology; behavioral, psychoanalytic and phenomenological-existential. Developmental approaches are also discussed here because of their relevance to the counseling of women in transition.

At the end of this chapter, a chart will be found which summarizes the three theoretical perspectives as they relate to the CEI. The goals of using the CEI and the categories of the CEI which would be emphasized by each perspective are highlighted. The CEI as used by counselors from differing perspectives will have meaning and impact for counseling interventions which are consistent with the practitioner's theoretical framework.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

From the developmental perspective, life is viewed as a process wherein patterns of critical events are directly related to life transitions and the emotional and personal issues which occur in relation to them. Personal development does not occur at an even pace. Growth often appears to be hindered or propelled by a phenomenon called a "stage" or "crisis," those times when life is constantly punctuated by challenges to preconceived no-

tions or belief/value systems about ourselves and the world. These challenges come from the mere circumstances of growing older (adapting to the changing environments of playpen to playground to school to work to retirement to death); they come from physical events (accidents, illness); external events (moving to another city, job loss); and they come from the personal discovery and evaluation of one's present situation, a sense of dissatisfaction or a renewed sense of mastery.

If Freud's four stages were the old testament of the developmental study of human beings and Erickson's the new, doctrinal refinements are being constantly made as we search out the stages of mid-life, stages of loss, stages of liberation, stages of dying. If we usually see through a glass darkly, the stages focus for us a sharper image of the new values and self-perceptions, the new feelings and beliefs which are evident at turning points in our lives. Patterns seen in past events contribute to the present point of view which represents one's unique identity. Life is no longer seen as a series of random events but as an evolutionary process.

The CEI exhibits the whole of life in microcosm, then and now dramatically presented. Anxiety and fear are growing pains, signs that solutions of the past are inadequate to address present realities. Events long in coming, such as an emotional breakdown, or instantaneous events such as a loved one's sudden death, confront us with strange, sometimes terrifying challenges. How does a person emerge with newly discovered strengths, acceptance of life's limits, modified value systems, a new view of self since the old view can stand no longer. Often these challenges involve the need for new ways of thinking and new principles with which to operate in rela-

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tionships with people and with the environment.

The CEI allows for a systematic approach to the discovery of the client's developing view of herself and the world. It provides a perspective on the events the client selects and the meanings she assigns to them. The interview material also reveals the underlying systems of beliefs, values and ways of thinking which evolve over time along with one's sense of identity. Whereas our common social myths have encouraged the person to deny, suppress or devalue problems of living, the use of the CEI validates the fact that not only are such crises to be expected in every person's life, but that they serve as catalysts for growth and development.

PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Psychoanalytically oriented counselors will most likely view the CEI in terms of the client's development of insight. In retelling past experiences, the opportunity exists to understand the relationship between the present self concept, relationships, feelings and behaviors, and past life events. In recognizing past motivations more clearly, the client is better able to assess the present situation and to explore new directions for change. For the psychoanalytically oriented counselor, the CEI provides a framework from which traditional psychoanalytic processes (catharsis, insight, working through and transference) can take place. The CEI can also be used to clarify feelings since the feelings associated with past events are often unrecognized, unexpressed or misunderstood. Through the CEI, the client is directed to go beyond the cognitive level, to focus on feelings and to express them.

Fine (1973) characterized psychoanalysis as adopting a problem solving approach in which a problem is formulated and solutions discovered. Through such techniques as free association and recollection of past experiences, life events become the material from which interpretation of life patterns becomes possible. Insight into motivations of the past is attained and new cognitive, emotional and behavioral patterns are searched out. By prefacing counseling with the CEI, the stage is set for the development of insight into the dynamics of past, inadequate self perceptions, feelings, motivations and behaviors. Insight serves as the bridge to the discovery of healthier ways of perceiving and feeling about oneself, so clearly seen in juxtaposition to the old patterns revealed in the critical events. With the aid of counseling, the client moves beyond perception and motivation and develops new ways of acting. The Adlerian, in fact, defines insight as understanding translated into constructive action. Again, the new behavior can become imminently clear when contrasted to old behaviors preceeding the critical event. In focusing on the critical event as the "matter" of counseling, the CEI serves as framework so that past patterns of perceiving, feeling and behaving can lead through insight, to a more integrated and differentiated personal identity.

In counseling with life crises, the practitioner may assume that ongoing life problems are accentuated in and symbolized by conflicts demonstrated in a past critical event. Thus a critical event can ultimately be understood by the client as the occasion for personal growth in an area not yet fully developed. For example, a person troubled by the death of a spouse, a severe accident or financial loss, can ultimately realize that these are more

than external events. They become the occasion for internal change when undeveloped potentialities are discovered or perceived limits are recognized.

Since the purpose of the CEI from a psychoanalytic perspective is developing insight, counselors adopting this approach will be likely to emphasize material obtained from the CEI category of Feelings/Thoughts toward the expression and clarification of feelings and cognitive style. Insight into unresolved conflicts and relationship patterns will be gained from reviewing Coping Strategies, Key to Movement and Roadblocks to Resolution.

BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

Behaviorists emphasize decision and action as the ultimate goal of therapy. The CEI can be used to set the stage for decision making and behavior change by laying the groundwork for a counseling process through which alternative plans of behavior can be tested and then evaluated.

The CEI, used within the behavioral perspective, provides a framework for reporting observations on behaviors and for determining reinforcements from both significant others and environmental circumstances. By reviewing past events in the present, the client and the counselor can also identify the antecedent conditions and pinpoint the factors that played an important part in the development or absence of the target behavior.

To "know thyself" means to "know thy controlling variables." The traditional behavioral counselor focuses attention on the concrete, observable behavior of clients, tending to place less importance on the feelings,

thoughts, ideology and meanings of clients. Abstractions and explanations, as the traditional behavioral counselor sees them, are useful to the degree that they enable counselor and client to identify the environmental variables that have had a powerful effect on the life decisions and behaviors of the client.

Since the overall purpose of behavioral counseling is behavior change, the counselor will most likely focus on CEI material that most directly relates to the target behaviors, antecedents, consequences and reinforcements as revealed in the CEI categories of Behavior, Coping Strategies, and in the responses to the questions concerning sources of support. Material from the categories of Key to Movement and Roadblocks to Resolution will be important since critical events are characterized by a clash of conflicting forces that, upon resolution, are reflected in observable behavior. The conflict model proposed by Dollard and Miller (1950) would be likely to conceptualize critical events in this way.

Growing numbers of behavioral practitioners have begun to consider the impact of attitudes and beliefs in a therapeutic approach called "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy." Based on the work of Albert Ellis (1962), the approach suggests that behavior follows personal cognitive formulations, or private understandings, about the way the world should or must be. Absolute or irrational thinking, according to Ellis, is the principle source of the emotional reactions that create problems in living. The CEI, as it explores the panorama of client experience, will enable the cognitive-behavioral counselor to identify patterns of self-defeating beliefs, particularly through using the CEI categories of Feelings/Thoughts and Ideology.

Behavioral counseling, more than any other approach, is a treatment focused almost exclusively on observable outcomes with minimal attention to more traditional goals such as self-awareness and insight. The measure of effectiveness, according to traditional behavioral counselors, is the new, purposeful behavior of clients. Some behaviorists, however, (Thorsen & Mahoney, 1974) have suggested that learning theory should become a tool placed in the hands of clients rather than a technology used on clients. They have been advocates of behavioral self-management by which the individual facilitates self-directed change. The CEI can be used to help the client to focus on patterns of behavior, to set goals, to determine reinforcers, and to decide on the behavioral objectives.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The CEI brings forth the client's experience of herself in relation to past events, the recreation and completion of past experiences and the awareness of her point of view on herself, others and the world. Further, the CEI helps clarify value and belief systems on the part of both counselor and client.

Exploring perceived turning points in the life of the client reflects an underlying respect for the client's unique point of view and for her private experience of the world in which she lives. The emphasis is on the client's present experience from a holistic perspective as provided by her sharing of the various aspects of her experience of past events, for it is the client's personal perceptions of the events rather than the events themselves which are important to the practitioner in the phenomenological-ex-

istential perspective.

As the client recreates a past event with its concomitant sounds and sights, feelings and motives, images and expectations, it is, however, not the past person that is experienced; rather it is an experience of the present person with whatever perception and affect the re-experiencing of the past event evokes. The re-experience brings with it an awareness that the client as an observer of self can see that the present person will never again be the same as the past person in the original experience.

The CEI brings an awareness that "I am different now." It may be recognition of unfinished business, of growth and completeness, or of values that have changed to indicate that the present person could never be satisfied with the past self. The awareness is of a different "I," "the I who I really have come to be."

Gestalt counseling is an approach that emphasizes the ongoing process of life as it is experienced moment by moment. The CEI takes the past, critical event out of one's past history and challenges the client to place the event in perspective. That is, the event is taken from the ground of life's successive events and brought into the foreground. As figure, the event becomes the center of attention. The client can then focus on the kinds of internal processes that are unique to that critical event, the thoughts and feelings experienced at the time. The various aspects of the experience can now be given greater attention so that the figure can be seen clearly against the background.

The categories of Ideology and Roadblocks to Resolution tend to high-

light the powerful intrapersonal conflicts that mark critical events. Gestalt counseling holds that these conflicts are resolved and integrated through their expression. In a general sense, these conflicts, marked by polarities such as independence-dependence, activity-passivity, strength-weakness, highlight the social discord of the culture, changing roles, self-perceptions and changing expectations of others. On the personal level, the practitioner might use the history of intrapersonal conflict to either complete "unfinished business" or to identify reoccurring themes.

Existential practitioners and those counselors interested in the growing study of the value clarification process will find the CEI categories of Ideology and Meanings especially important. In fact, as the sequencing of the CEI moves from behavior to feelings, cognitions, ideology and finally meaning, the client moves from the concrete to greater abstraction. The client is challenged to explore the relationship between behavior, feelings, values and sense of self. The movement from the concrete to the abstract creates a framework from which to progress into issues of identity and life meanings.

While other perspectives may find the CEI effective in highlighting important themes and generating data for further exploration, the phenomenological-existential school would suggest that the CEI itself, conducted by an empathetic and sensitive counselor, is of therapeutic value. The open-ended, self-reflective nature of the experience contributes to its therapeutic quality. The focus on Feelings/Thoughts, Ideology and Meanings challenges the client to understand and express the totality of her life. While the CEI takes place within a structure, conducted under fa-

cilitating conditions, it enables each client to move at her own pace, exploring the critical events that have contributed to her emerging identity.

Just as each client selects certain critical events from the universe of her life experiences, so also each practitioner finds some theoretical perspectives more useful in the counseling process than others. Reflection upon a critical life event is like looking at a prism; turn it one way and one aspect is seen -- turn it another and a rather different perspective comes to play. The value of the CEI is that it offers an opportunity to view the event in a systematic way through several dimensions. For the client, the CEI becomes her personal developmental history; for the counselor, it provides a sense of the client's life as a whole and the presenting problem in particular, and reveals the client's perspective on her own life.

THE CEI THROUGH THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

BEHAVIORAL

PURPOSE: BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

1. Obtain information about behavior, reinforcement patterns and environmental stimuli.
2. Allow client to see that she can act differently than she has.
3. Establish behavior goals.
4. Develop self-control and problem solving skills.

PSYCHOANALYTIC

PURPOSE: INSIGHT

1. Recall past history and unresolved conflicts associated with events.
2. Gain insight about relationships (working through, transference).
3. Express feelings (catharsis).
4. Identify motivational factors related to psychodynamic processes.
5. Promote development of therapeutic relationship (transference).
6. Bring up painful feelings associated with childhood traumas and resolve these events (abreaction).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL

PURPOSE: AWARENESS/EXPERIENCE

1. Experiential process for self awareness and reflection on past self from present perspectives.
2. A means of focusing on various aspects of experience in a way that leads to a sense of resolution (wholeness, completeness).
3. Clarify unique point of view of client on self, others and the world.
4. Clarify (counselor/client) values and belief systems.

CEI CATEGORIES OF EMPHASIS

1. TRADITIONAL BEHAVIORAL
   Behavior:
   a. antecedents
   b. environmental contingencies
   c. reinforcements (support system)
   d. advantages/disadvantages of the behavior
2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION
   Behavior, Coping Strategies, Key to Movement, Roadblocks to Resolution
3. COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL
   Behavior, Feelings/Thoughts, Ideology
   "Cost-Gain" value of behavior change (Roadblocks to Resolution).

1. Feelings/Thoughts
   Expression and clarification of feelings and and cognitive style.
2. Insight into conflicts through Coping Strategies, Key to Movement, Roadblocks to Resolution.
3. Determine patterns in past relationships and sources of support.
4. View of self in relation to past events, relationships and motivation.

1. Experience self in present as related to past events (Ideology).
2. Meaning and present perspective.
3. Conflicts resolved through expression (Roadblocks to Resolution and Key to Movement)
4. Personal realizations which promote a sense of choice.
5. Holistic view of client through experiences shared by client herself.

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CHAPTER 5: THE CEI AND FEMINIST THERAPY

THE CEI AND FEMINIST THERAPY

At this time, feminist therapy (this term includes feminist counseling as well) is probably most accurately described as an approach to the counseling of women rather than as a theory of psychotherapy. However, considering the rapid growth in the area of the psychology of women, in addition to related interdisciplinary studies of women in the social and behavioral studies, the decade of the '80's may well see the emergence of feminist therapy into a comprehensive theory of counseling and psychotherapy. In fact, the Committee on Women, Division 17 on Counseling Psychology, American Psychological Association, has initiated a task force to study the application of knowledge about women to both the practice of counseling and the development of model training programs for counselors of women.

A comprehensive discussion of feminist therapy is beyond the scope of this manual, and for such, the reader is referred to Psychotherapy For Women (Rawlings & Carter, 1977), Women and Psychotherapy (Brodsky & Hare-Mustin, 1980) and Counseling Women: A Therapist's Guide (Collier, 1982). Although contemporary feminist therapists represent a variety, and often a combination, of theoretical orientations, are employed in a range of service settings and are part of a number of specific professions within the broader scope of the helping professions, there is a common body of interrelated principles which directs and informs their work. These may be summarized as follows:

1. The client is actively encouraged to assume increasing control over all aspects of her life and to make and implement her own decisions regarding lifestyle, relationships, education, work, health and recreation;

2. All human beings exhibit, and should be encouraged to exhibit, a wide range of characteristics, behaviors and feelings which are to be valued not on the basis of gender, but on the basis of their overall contribution to the emergence of full personhood;

3. The client must learn to differentiate with increasing accuracy between her own needs, desires, abilities and goals, and those which have been socially ascribed to her because of gender, ethnicity or social status;

4. With the support of her counselor, the client must confront the reality and scope of her life in a sexist society, and come, however gradually, to recognize its impact upon her development and choices;

5. The client comes to understand the impact of religions, traditions, racial, ethnic and social class status in the formation of her identity as a woman and makes conscious choices about the meanings of these areas for herself;

6. The client makes decisions which are consistent with her personal well being, but which insofar as possible, contribute to social change as well. She analyses the risks and consequences of her decisions and proceeds on the basis of her own assessment rather than the expectations of others;

7. The relationship between client and counselor is an egalitarian one in which the client experiences and exercises power, demonstrates capacities and learns to think and to act with efficacy;

8. The experiences, thoughts and feelings of the client are legitimate, validated and are viewed as contributing to the ongoing process of uncovering the truth about women's lives.

In addition, Collier (1982) points out that a common goal of feminist therapy is that of helping clients understand the social, historical and political context of their problems and encouraging them to combat the effects of sex stereotyping on their lives.

The CEI reflects these principles of feminist therapy and it provides for a process whereby such principles may be implemented in counseling. For example:

1. In the CEI, the client tells her own story on her own terms. She selects the events which she sees as important in her life. Interestingly enough, women do not always select events which others, even counselors, might assume they would.
2. The CEI places the client in active control of the session or sessions in which the CEI takes place. With a few guiding questions from the counselor, the client selects and describes the dynamics of the events.
3. The CEI contributes to client empowerment. Most women experience a surge of power and pride during or at the conclusion of the CEI.
4. By narrating several events, the client begins to get a sense of the

patterns of her development over her life span. Frequently, the client herself, with little or no assisstance from the counselor, is able to identify previous life patterns as revealed through the various critical events of her life and is able to begin to see the effects of those patterns on her choices.

5. The CEI helps the client begin to validate her own experiences through the telling of her life story. In some cases, the recalling of the event comes close to the re-experiencing of it, so that with the perspective of time and the support of the counselor, feelings that were not fully understood or conflicts that were not completely resolved may be addressed.
6. The CEI reveals to the client and her counselor the internal and external limitations on her previous life choices, and further, lays the groundwork for informed decisions about the present and future by specifying her sources of support, roadblocks and the kinds of trade-offs she made in the past.

As a tool for the feminist counselor, the CEI contributes to the client's expanding sense of self by developing her ability to distinguish that self from political, social and historical circumstances and from internal and external constraints. During the 1980's, women and their counselors will need such strategies to grapple with society's double message evidenced by the considerable legal and economic gains on the one hand and the defeat of ERA on the other.

APPENDIXES:

Instructions to Clients
The CEI Format
The CEI Abbreviated Format
Examples of the CEI

THE CRITICAL EVENTS INTERVIEW

INSTRUCTIONS TO CLIENTS*

During our interview, we will discover together the events in your life which you think have influenced how you see yourself. In other words, what experiences or happenings or critical events or turning points have made a difference in your feelings and understandings about yourself?

These events may be external or internal. That is, they may be something that actually happened to you, or they may take the form of realizations, awareness, and other kinds of internal experiences. They may have been associated with positive or negative emotions. They may or may not be known to anyone else or viewed as important by anyone else.

There may be few or many of these events that you can recall. Nor do they have to be discussed in the order in which you experienced them. We can go back and put them in order at the end of the interview.

What is important here, for this interview, is that you see the events as having made a difference in your view of yourself. Please feel free to spend sometime before the interview thinking about some of those events in your life. Make some notes for yourself if you wish.

* To be provided a week or so ahead.

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THE CRITICAL EVENTS INTERVIEW FORMAT

Chronological order of this event_____

Client_____

Date _____

1. EVENT

What was the specific event or experience?

2. BEHAVIOR

Give me a little bit of background.

How did you act with regard to the event?

3. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

How did you feel then?

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Client_____

Date_____

What did you think then?

4. COPING STRATEGIES

What were some of the things that you did in order to get through?

Who and what helped? How?

Who and what hurt? How?

5. IDEOLOGY

Close your eyes for a moment and picture (use client's first name) at the time of this event. What kind of a place is the world for her? What kind of a place does she think the world is? Why does she think that?

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Client_____
Date _____

IDEOLOGY (alternative approach)

Remember back to how (use client's first name) was then. Did (use clients first name) have a picture of the woman she wanted to become?

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

Did you finally work it out?

How did you work it out?

Who and what could have helped you work it out more quickly or more easily?

7. ROAD BLOCKS TO RESOLUTION

Who and what kept you from working it out?

What did you have to give up? Some trade-offs?

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Client_____
Date _____

8. MEANING OF THE EVENT

What does the event mean to you now?

What did you learn from it? How are you different because of it?

How did it change you?

9. NAME OF THE EVENT

If you were to give this event a name, what would you call it?

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THE CEI ABBREVIATED FORMAT

1. EVENT: What was the specific event or experience?

2. BEHAVIOR: Give me a little background. How did you act with regard to the event?

3. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS: How did you feel then? What did you think then?

4. COPING STRATEGIES: What were some of the things you did in order to get through? Who and what helped? How? Who and what hurt?

5. IDEOLOGY: What kind of place do you think the world is? Why do you think that? How did you feel about yourself at that time?

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT: Did you finally work it out? How did it work out? Who or what could have helped you work it out more quickly or more easily?

7. ROADBLOCK TO RESOLUTION: Who and what kept you from working it out? What did you have to give up? Some trade offs?

8. MEANING OF CRITICAL EVENT: What does the event mean to you now? What did you learn from it? How are you different because of it?

9. NAME OF EVENT: If you were to give this event a name, what would you call it?

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EXAMPLES

OF

THE CRITICAL EVENTS INTERVIEW

The following pages contain examples of the CEI. For purposes of clarity, the first example includes the categories together with their accompanying probes and the responses of the client. Subsequent examples include only the responses of the client.

The reader will note that some examples do not contain the categories of Road Blocks to Resolution, and Meaning of the Event. These categories were added in revisions of the CEI and therefore made after the interviews from which some examples have been drawn.

CEI

EXAMPLE No 1

1. EVENT

What was the specific event/experience?

My separation.

2. BEHAVIOR

Give me a little bit of background

Husband had been working as a long distance truck driver and he was gone long periods of time and I realized he took this job because he could not settle down.

How did you act with regard to the event?

Although I sought the separation, it completely destroyed me for a few days.

3. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

How did you feel then?

A very traumatic event in my life. No longer having someone to support me financially and emotionally; I have responsibility of two children, was overwhelming.

What did you think then?

I am a person of action and knew I had to get a job and I did four days later.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

What were some of the things that you did in order to get through?

Job - a very interesting job and I saw potential, I threw myself into it and my children. All my love went to them.

Who/what helped? How?

My mother and my sister. Looking after my children even though I had a babysister.

Who/what hurt? How?

All the family who expected the children to behave a certain way and they expected me to give all my time to the children, but I couldn't because I had to work.

5. IDEOLOGY

Close your eyes for a moment and picture (use person's first name) at the time of this event. A) What kind of a place is the world for her? B) What kind of a place does she think the world is? C) Why does she think that?

A. Overwhelming, frightening.

B. A place where you are really on your own.

C. Because I alone am responsible for what happens to me or my children.

Remember back to how (use person's first name) was then. Did (use person's first name) have a picture of the woman she wanted to become?

Not yet.

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

Did you finally work it out?

Oh yes.

How did you work it out?

I adjusted and grew as a person and my biggest problem was coping with my responsibility. I found I could be self supporting and I could solve problems and kept growing in self confidence.

KEY TO MOVEMENT (CONTINUED)

Who/what (others) could have helped you work it out more quickly or more easily?

No one. You have to do it for yourself.

7. ROAD BLOCKS TO RESOLUTION

Who/what kept you from working it out?
Myself. I was not mature enough.

What did you have to give up? Some trade-offs?

I had to give up my free time. I had no time for myself. I did not have time to read or go to movies, entertainment of any kind.

8. MEANING OF EVENT

A. What does the event mean to you now?
B. What did you learn from it? C. How are you different because of it? D. How did it change you?

A. It opened a new life and growth as a human being. I believe I would have been stunted if I had remained married.

B. I learned I could make my life what I wanted and I could do what I wanted. I had the ability to do it.

C. I became independent, outgoing, overt. I learned to enjoy life.

D. I became aware of all the possibilities that life holds for a person.

CEI
EXAMPLE No. 2

1. EVENT

My child.

2. BEHAVIOR

It helped me to grow up. I was timid; I had to face responsibility, not count on people.

I told everyone I was going to have a girl, but it was a boy. I had a lot of matrimonial problems.

3. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

I was happy. I never regreted that I was pregnant. I was down but I didn't let it get to me.

I always wanted a child because my ex-husband and I couldn't make it. I was not going to let anything happen to the child. I was going to give him what he could give.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

I cried a lot. Talking to people.

My parents helped me a lot. I went to live with them and didn't have to work. They gave me food and shelter.

My ex-husband. He never hit me; just that he didn't want me, love me nor, the baby.

5. IDEOLOGY

I felt like I wouldn't make it in a marriage. What was wrong with me? How would I make it alone? Would I find someone else? Would they love my baby? Scary and lonely place!

CEI
EXAMPLE No. 2

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

I'm getting there.

Because I moved out and found I could make it on my own.

7. ROAD BLOCKS TO RESOLUTION

Freedom--not loose, but when you have a child, you can't do a lot of stuff. I had to take the baby everywhere I go.

8. MEANING OF EVENT

I'm happy and love my baby so much. I grew up; I've matured. I thought I could never do anything. My parents used to tell me everything I had to do. Now I do what's best.

CEI
EXAMPLE No. 3

1. EVENT

Discovering I had multiple sclerosis.

2. BEHAVIOR

I discovered I had multiple sclerosis just as I was getting started as an art teacher. The school would not let me continue working.

3. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

I denied the disease -- fought against the idea constantly. I was angry that it happened to me just when I was discovering good capabilities in myself.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

I worked on my art, talked and read a lot, which helped.

5. IDEOLOGY

Be realistic. Discover what I can do.

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

Finally accepted the disease. The release from angry feelings freed up my energy to go on and do other things.

7. ROADBLOCKS TO RESOLUTION

Lapsed into dependency now and then -- it was so easy.

CEI
EXAMPLE No. 4

1. EVENT

Deciding on Law School.

2. BEHAVIORS

Afraid to leave college - secure there. Somewhat discouraging that parents couldn't finance law school. Wanted to be close to future husband so applied for counseling position in dorm. Finally got it and went to Law School.

3. FEELINGS/THOUGHTS

Scared - afraid to leave security of college - feeling real insecure. Reached my goal of getting a B.A. Now what - no more goals - no career drive? I was thinking about marriage.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

Scared that I couldn't make it in law school. Everyone discouraged my entering law school. Unhappy/insecure in school with all men. Eventually realized that men are also insecure.

5. IDEOLOGY

At least I had a B.A. in teaching. I had something to fall back on, but the boys didn't. Kept thinking I would flunk out.

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

Make all sorts of new friends/new activities. Worked very hard intellectually. Dating/going to parties.

7. ROADBLOCKS TO RESOLUTION

Felt great about self eventually. lots of confidence. Unhappy about boyfriend and not getting married. During law school, I was marking time until I could marry boyfriend.

Finished law school, Scared - what will I do now?

CEI
EXAMPLE No. 5

1. EVENT

Discovered lumps in breasts.

2. BEHAVIOR

Began to reassess what and who I am. What do I want for me? Beginning to recognize and respect the needs of husband and self for independence as well as dependence.

3. FEELINGS/THOUGHTS

Accepting more responsibility for own ambivalence. (Don't lay so much at husband's door). Feelings of anger surfacing as the evidence of sexism suddenly became apparent in several worlds - insurance, wife-mother vs career.

4. COPING STRATEGIES

Getting an inkling that husband may be beginning to hear what I'm saying about needs. Still played role of handling everything. Filled my life with multitude of things - decorated house, active social life, volunteer work.

5. IDEOLOGY

What do I want for me?

6. KEY TO MOVEMENT

How many years do I have left? Suddenly faced with my own finiteness.